



Adrian Pederick MP
Member for Hammond

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MURRAY-DARLING BASIN AUTHORITY

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (15:31): I rise today to highlight the government's mismanagement of the River Murray following its announcement to cut contributions to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority. In December 2012, former treasurer, Jack Snelling, announced the state government would be cutting funds to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority by \$14.3 million, citing his reasons as simply because New South Wales had made cuts.

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority manages on behalf of the states the more than \$3 billion worth of assets associated with the River Murray, and to hear that the government is halving its contributions to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority is both concerning and disappointing. The contributions go to the operations, maintenance and management of the \$3 billion worth of assets assisting the river. From our dams, weirs and locks, to operations like salt interception schemes and fish programs, the MDBA joint programs provide the funding to maintain such infrastructure and programs. It is basic river care, and I criticise the Weatherill Labor government for slashing its contributions—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I remind the member, please, that you refer to ministers by their title or by their electorate, not by their name.

Mr PEDERICK: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for that advice. I do criticise the Weatherill Labor government for slashing its contributions to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority. New South Wales advised in June 2012 that it would be reducing its contributions for the MDBA joint programs from \$32.3 million to \$8.9 million in 2013-14, making a total reduction of \$23 million or 73 per cent. Following suit, the South Australian government advised it would be also reducing its contribution for the MDBA joint programs by half, from \$28.6 million to \$14.3 million in 2014-15. The former treasurer stated on 21 December 2012 on ABC 891, and I quote:

New South Wales made a decision recently to reduce their contribution by 73 per cent. Now, South Australia extracts about 7 per cent of the water out of the river; at the moment we pay about a quarter of the funding towards the MDBA...but...when one state's slashing its funding by three quarters...I can't expect South Australian taxpayers to...support this organisation in an unfair way.

South Australia was originally contributing 24 per cent of the cost share for the joint program, with New South Wales providing 29 per cent, Victoria 28 per cent and the commonwealth making a contribution of 18 per cent, with the remaining 1.3 per cent divided between the ACT and Queensland. However, these percentage break-ups will now change as a result of the Weatherill Labor government's stubbornness.

I am extremely concerned. If other states follow New South Wales' lead as the South Australian government has done, the level of funding the MDBA will be left with will be insufficient to cover basic river operations. The River Murray is a highly emotive issue especially when considering our eastern counterparts and that the South Australian government is saying they do not want to continue—in their words—to pay the money to effectively subsidise New South Wales, coupled with the Weatherill Labor government's mismanagement of the state's finances.

The Premier has abandoned the River Murray. South Australians who have supported the state's Save the Murray campaign should be severely disappointed. Some \$3 billion has been invested in assets to restore the river's health and now the Murray-Darling Basin Authority will struggle to manage these assets.

The Premier's campaign to return 3,200 gigalitres to the River Murray is well and truly proven to be hollow rhetoric with this slash in funding, especially in light of the infrastructure work needed in South Australia over the years, including major upgrades to the barrages at Goolwa. Upgrading the barrages alone will need hundreds of millions of dollars, and I note that the Hon. Ian Hunter in the other place is trying to justify the government's position in answer to questions.

What the government does not realise is that in my electorate, the mouth of the river at Goolwa is where hundreds of millions of dollars, as I have just indicated, will need to be spent over time, so slashing funding puts programs at risk not just there but right throughout the river. For this government to slash funding is totally wrong, totally out of control and goes totally against their so-called words of saving the River Murray.

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